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INMATE SAYS HE TOLD FBI OF TERRORIST PLOT

CORRECTION PUBLISHED SATURDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2001 A story on Page 4A in Friday's editions incorrectly identified an FBI agent investigating the claims of a Miami inmate. That inmate, Thomas Oses, alleged that in 1997 an imprisoned cleric told him of planned terrorist attacks. The agent, who called the inmate's attorney, is Jose Orihuela. We regret the error.

FBI agents have been questioning a Miami jail inmate who says an imprisoned holy man linked to terrorists told him in 1997 of plans to fly an airplane into the Pentagon and other structures, including a nuclear power plant in Savannah.

Thomas Oses, being held at the Metro West Detention Center on an unrelated extortion charge, insists that blind Egyptian cleric Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman told him about the plot during a brief period when they were doing time at a the federal prison in Springfield, Mo.

A supervisor at the jail said Oses has been held in an isolated safety cell for his own protection since he began talking about his involvement with the sheik. The officer said two FBI agents went to the jail on Tuesday to talk with Oses and his lawyer.

Oses, 44, claims he wrote a detailed 10- to 12-page letter to the FBI after being transferred to the federal prison in Talladega, Ala., in the fall of 1997, when he felt safe to talk about the disclosure, his court-appointed lawyer, Terence Lenamon, said on Thursday.

"He told the FBI Tuesday exactly about the specific circumstances and how it came about that he was able to gain the confidence of the sheik," said Lenamon, who refused to go into further details and said his client did not want to talk before a scheduled appearance on CNN today.

Abdel-Rahman, serving a mandatory life sentence, is considered the spiritual leader of a cell of conspirators who were convicted in October 1995 of plotting to wage a holy war against the United States.

According to the government's case against them, their plans included blowing up the United Nations, FBI offices, highway tunnels and other New York-area landmarks, in a single day of terror.

Several of the defendants also were implicated in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. One of them, Sayyid Nosair, also was found guilty of murdering Jewish Defense League leader Rabbi Meir Kahane in 1990.

At his sentencing in a New York courtroom in January 1996, Abdel- Rahman said that he and the others were victims of a U.S. war against Islam. In response, U.S. District Judge Michael Mukasey said that had their plot succeeded, it "would have resulted in the murder of hundreds, if not thousands of people, and brought about devastation on a scale that beggars the imagination, certainly on a scale unknown in this country since the Civil War."

Boston lawyer Anthony Mirenda, who represented Oses during the time he was in federal custody, confirmed through a spokesperson that Oses told him in 1997 that he wrote the FBI about conversations with Abdel-Rahman, and that two agents went to the prison to talk to him.

"But Tony never saw the letter and doesn't have a copy," said the spokesperson, who asked not to be identified.

Federal Bureau of Prisons spokeswoman Traci Billingsley said the pair were both at the Springfield prison in the summer of 1997. Abdel- Rahman is now at the federal medical center in Rochester, Minn., she said.

Miami FBI spokeswoman Judy Orihuela said the bureau would not comment. But Lenamon's telephone log shows that the office has received at least four calls over the past week from FBI offices in New York and Miami, including one from Orihuela.

Lenamon says that before he took over the case from the Public Defender's Office, a Miami-Dade detective told the public defender that the FBI in Alabama confirmed that they had Oses' letter and that agents had met with him in 1997. "That's the hardest evidence we have, outside of what our client is telling us," said Lenamon, who has requested a copy from the FBI, and also informed members of Congress out of concern "that the case is thoroughly investigated and the letter not altered."

About 15 House and Senate members or their representatives have called about the case, Lenamon said.

"When I got involved I said, 'Listen, Tom, this is very serious stuff. What is your interest?' And he said his interest is to let the American people know what is going on," Lenamon said.

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